



SOUTH CHICAGO ABC
ZINE DISTRO
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Interview with Anthony Rayson

1. FPN Who is Anthony Rayson?

Answer: Anthony Rayson (me!) is a 51 year old father, husband and working-class so-called "white" dude, who also happens to be a seriously dedicated anarchist revolutionary. I'm "Joe Normal" with a big time social conscience. I happen to detest injustice, liars, violence, predation and so forth. I'm a writer, editor & organizer. I'm the guy in the sub-basement of the underground, with a bucket and a mop!

2. FPN What is an Anarchist?

Answer: Anarchists are people motivated by the best instincts of mankind. We believe in voluntary cooperation, mutual aid, solidarity, freedom, equality, genuine justice, fairness, honesty. So, naturally, the government, being the sickening coercive and lie-based predators and business whores that they are, characterize us as mad bombers, criminals, vandals and so forth. A check of history will find anarchists at the forefront of many inspired revolutions throughout the world and boasting among the most brilliant, insightful and selfless examples of human beings this planet has yet to produce.

Anarchists are "anti-authoritarians" and rely on the natural goodness of people to guide their thinking. We do not believe in fantasy (religion) yet we can be very spiritual. We believe important decisions that affect people should be decided by those people themselves, not dictated by a king, president, congress or any other top-down entity (corporations, the churches, the monstrous military, etc.) We have a saying: "No Masters, No Gods."

We feel people can truly liberate themselves by learning the truth and relying on themselves, opening up a world of possibilities. We feel the world's resources should be shared among the world's people equitably in an environmentally sustainable way. This, of course, is the antithesis of how the U.S. - dominated global system of thievery, waste and oppression is presently set up.

We believe prisons are an abomination upon the very soul of humanity and must be abolished and those held captive set free. This does not, however, say that we condone aberrant, criminal behavior, whatsoever. Violence, intimidation, slavery and economic tyranny (capitalism) are state condoned and protected organized crime that we feel should be ended, so humanity can live freely and cooperatively. We do not believe in private property or restrictive borders that most probably were taken and demarcated shortly after the slaughtering of the people who lived on that land earlier. We do not believe the elaborate system of laws, police, judges, gulags and so forth are legitimate and in fact, constitute a massive, daily criminal, racist onslaught on those poor people ensnared by their hired kidnappers. We see taxes as massive extortion, another serious crime.

Some of the most brilliant, talented, selfless, dedicated and brave humans consider themselves "anarchists" and the government-controlled world has thanked these people by lying incessantly about them and drowning them in oceans of blood. The word anarchy comes from the Greek meaning "no government." Amen, brothers & sisters!

3. FPN How did you become an Anarchist?

Answer: Well, I'm a unique case. I grew up in the sixties and was lucky enough to have a fantastic mentor, while growing up - my father. He was a genuine social justice crusader and opened up a world of knowledge and commitment, and experiences, other kids my age never got a chance to see and feel. It grounded me as a sensitive, thinking person, whose goal in life was to learn the truth and spread the word. After the Vietnam War ended, it was like a punctured balloon, as far as massive social movements go, here in this country. I became disillusioned and was forced to work and deal with this rat race country. I wrote my first zine in 1974. It was called *Peoples' Polar Express*. But, I was atomized and withdrew into myself. There was no longer any real community of resistance that I could relate to, but I never gave up my principles.

It was not until 1995 that I had a sort of epiphany. Although I subscribed to 'radical' journals and so forth, I never got hooked up with the "underground." The *Progressive* ran an interview with Noel Ignatiev, then a Harvard professor, (since fired for his activism) who articulated the Neo-Abolitionist point of view. Finally! Here was a man who was unafraid to tell the truth! I then pursued my radicalizing self-education in earnest. I hooked up with Fred Woodworth's longtime anarchist journal, *The Match!* and got many contacts, which I pursued with a vengeance. At this point, there was no stopping me and shortly, my dogged self-education led me to realizing that I'd been a sort of dormant anarchist all along. Soon enough, I realized that the most aware people were prisoners and the gulags were ground zero in the struggle, here at home, so I focused my time and attention on them. So, I was able to flower as the writer and advocate that I had foreseen myself to be at an early age. I overcame my fear, studied and learned and took my place as a "souljah." I saw a huge need for empowering education and thus, oriented myself to find &/or create powerful, thrilling, well-written revolutionary education - history, analysis, poetry, artwork, etc., etc. and provide it free to prisoners (and cheap people on the "outs.") It seemed an ideal way to maximize my contributions and fill a huge need.

4. FPN Working in a system under government control, isn't it a contradiction as to what an Anarchist believes in and doesn't it pose a problem for you?

Answer: No. An Anarchist believes in dealing in reality. Like anybody else, I need some form of income to pay for the basics of life, provide for my family and so forth. So, to get this money, you must submit to being a wage-slave, almost invariably. Also, to set myself up to be able to realize my dream of being a free skool (anarchist) educator, I needed a steady income to self-study, learn and develop. For me, getting a 40-hour a week job allowed for this to happen. I was (and am) a very conscientious worker, who cares about the welfare of my co-workers and others I have dealings with. I have always opposed the bosses and never considered becoming one, myself. Also, I came from a bourgeois background. I was tracked to become a professional - a lawyer, doctor, professor (which 3 of my siblings became.) I dropped out of college my second semester freshman year (spring of 1972) and hitch-hiked around the country for the next two years. At this time, all the colleges and universities went on strike to protest Nixon / Kissinger's second illegal invasion of Cambodia. My school stayed on strike one day. I struck forever! I would become an "intentional peasant" so I could live and feel what it is to be a wage-slave, working-class person. Later on, at my wife's urging, I went back to school and became that school's valedictorian. I used my seven minutes allotted for my address to a rapt audience of 500 people, to blast the administration and government. We live frugally in a two-bedroom, 1 bathroom house and I pour my energies and monies into my anarchist activities.

ABC's started during the Revolution in 1905 in Russia to aid anarchist prisoners being repressed by the Tsar. We support all prisoners, especially those who have stepped forward and challenged their captors - whether they are anarchists or not! As for the activists in these groups (notice I didn't say "leader!") ABC people are working people dedicated by the ideals of anarchism - freedom, justice, equality, for everybody. MPLU is sustained by brave prisoners, who've gone the extra step to fight their oppressors. Anybody can be an important participant in these or any other anti-authoritarian groups. It takes resolve, dedication, commitment and consistency. You learn and develop as you go. There's no magic formula. You get involved, learn and spread the news. Each one Teach one! We don't need any swelled heads around here, know what I mean?

17. FPN Is there anything that you feel is worthy of our readers attention that we have not asked in this interview or discussed that you would like to share with FPN. If so, feel free to do so.

Answer: Yes, thank you, first and foremost for asking me all of these questions. It's very gratifying to me to work with such righteous comrades! We (ABC) focus on prisoner support for two reasons, really. One is because support is so necessary and important. Also, some prisoners are uniquely insightful and their analysis is very important to push the social revolution forward. We do this for tactical reasons. We want to help facilitate the emergence of a conscious prisoner population, who (hopefully) will take these lessons back to their families and communities. We don't just do all this out of the kindness of our hearts. We're no better or worse than anybody else. We want to participate in the emancipation of humankind, once and for all. To us, striving towards these goals is the ultimate validation of our own humanity. We want to leave our children and their children in a world without borders, prisons, police, governments, corporations, nuclear weapons and ecological catastrophe. We want to end starvation, millionaires, billionaires and all the horrible systems of oppression and obfuscation that keep people from fighting for their own interests, which are a sustainable world of mutual respect, a sharing of the wealth in an equitable manner, where women don't have to fear going out at night and children are treated with respect and not groomed for work or prison. We want the world and we want it NOW!

I suggest prisoner write to:

AK Press
P.O. Box 40682
San Francisco, CA 94140-0682

It's like a phone book chock full of the best political material available.

PARC
P.O. Box 339
Berkeley, CA 94701

Ask for their Resource Guide for Prison Activists. It lists many dozens of support groups all around the country.

Also write to me, Anthony Rayson, at:

South Chicago ABC Zine Distro
P.O. Box 721
Homewood, IL 60430

I provide many dynamite zines on a wide variety of topics, with a special emphasis on the prisons.

14. FPN How did you first come into contact with MPLU and how does this organization and the ABC function together?

Answer: Oh, boy! I first met Jerome White-Bey (through correspondence) in 1998 or 1999. Right away I agreed to publish and distribute their organ, *Off the Hook*. As the 13th Amendment says, prisoners are slaves not entitled to form labor unions or to have any rights, really. So, this project, an anarchist-driven prisoner labor union went right to the heartless core of this society, in my opinion. We've had some rough times, as OTH was edited by four different groups/people and Jerome and the others have been constantly harassed, sent to the hole, stabbed and otherwise attacked throughout this time. ABC gives voice to MPLU in our publications, we disseminate their other literature and alerts on the internet and through paper publications, we help support them in other ways.

15. FPN How many chapters of the ABC are there that you know of and is there a principal chapter? How does that work?

Answer: Let's see. Houston, Boston, Lawrence and Chicago are the core groups. Other groups are starting in Lexington, Kentucky, Cleveland, Ohio, Des Moines, Iowa and somewhere up in Minnesota. In the spring, several members from Boston are moving to Liberty, Tennessee and will start a chapter there. We also have several other ABC "friends" who do similar work and who we collaborate with but for various reasons, do not want to be considered ABC chapters. Also there is an entire other ABC set of groups in North America (ABCF - Federation.) ABC groups are also to be found throughout Europe and South America. There is no "principal" chapter as we are a collection of autonomous groups, who make our own decisions. We gather once a year to go over our work and make decisions as a network. I've taken it upon myself to be the sort of focal point as far as contacting the network and receiving various publications, but the other chapters also provide excellent literature and so forth.

16. FPN This is a question of leadership. It's such a hard term to define because we all have our own idea of what a leader is or not. Trying to define a leader seems to raise more questions than answers. For the purpose of understanding ABC and MPLU, can you tell the readers what these initials mean and something about the leaders of these groups?

Answer: Leaders are bad news. George Bush is a "leader." Leaders issue orders that are only obeyed through coercion and the threat of violence. I don't believe in leaders. If someone tried to order me to do something, I wouldn't do it! As an anarchist, I'm against the whole top-down approach to getting anything done. Certainly, some people have a lot of drive, insight, talent and so forth and it does one well to listen to what they have to say and take their suggestions seriously. We believe in self-reliance, mutual aid, voluntary cooperation and solidarity. We do things because we see them as necessary and positive, not because we have been told to do them. If people are conditioned to rely on a "leader" what happens when that leader is killed or is evil? Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts, absolutely. Everyone should participate and learn what is going on. Relying on a "leader" is lazy and limits creative expression and grassroots contributions. Anarchist collectives do make decisions, but it is after a process of discussion, analysis and consensus. People need to shed their fear and inertia and realize their potential to add their contributions - not follow the leader. ABC (Anarchist Black Cross) & MPLU (Missouri Prison Labor Union) are anarchist-driven sister groups.

I work for the Illinois government, as a toll collector, a lowly position that is very stressful, dangerous and unhealthy work - much like any factory worker working for a miserable corporation. I do not promote government, but rather expose it!

Does it pose a problem for me, working this way? Yeah, it drains me, takes an enormous amount of my life and because of the real work I do, they treat me like a pariah. The police have infiltrated some of my groups, I'm monitored, tailed, stalked-out, etc. I'm a "working-class hero" as John Lennon would say, by choice - and I tell it like it is, every second I am on their clock. I spend my paycheck most wisely, mostly in support of prisoners. Anybody got a problem with that, they know where they can find me!

5. FPN Are you married and have children? If so, how does your wife and children feel about you being an Anarchist?

Answer: Yes, I am married (to my second wife.) On Valentine's Day, 2006, we will celebrate our twentieth wedding anniversary! We have two sons, Stanton who is 17 and Stephen who is 11. My wife is a loving, Christian woman, who is a librarian by profession. It is difficult for them (and me) as they have trouble understanding why I spend so much of my free time dealing with the concerns of prisoners, when I could be devoting my time and attention to them. She's a liberal and so, we have severe fundamental differences in opinion. She respects my dedication and almost palpable social justice loving heart. It's an endless, daily wrangle and compromise to maintain a tranquil, loving and non-resentful household. I have to make compromises and so do they. I sleep as little as possible and sneak as much real work, whenever I can. I cut my outside non-anarchist activities to the bone. I work with alacrity, constantly, every day until I drop. The next day, I pick up where I left off, simple as that!

6. FPN FPN learned that you are an author and publisher. What do you write about?

Answer: I focus my attention on political reality with a heavy focus on the prisons. I would love to write beautiful novels or whatever, but I see it to be my duty to write about what is the crisis situation in this country. But, I don't feel I compromise my literary side in doing this. I feel even political analysis about the dreary gulag archipelago can be a thrilling, enjoyable, insightful, funny, sarcastic, explosive read! In fact, it needs to be, to shake people out of their lethargy and help them overcome their own intellectual timidity and calcification. I try to write in such a way that people can't help but be impacted by what I say and this is underscored by the way I say it. I like people to know that they can expect the straight dope from me - no ivory tower pretentiousness, or other bullshit. It's one of the reasons, I insisted on being working-class (I've had this miserable job 30+ years, now.) I'm an emotional dude and I choose my words carefully to convey my loathing and hatred for this morbid system. I get sick of seeing writers walking on eggshells with their words. Fuck that! I believe in blurring out the brutal truth, you know? We must continue to jack up the level of our words and actions until we achieve our deepest desires - worldwide anarchy, where all oppressive systems are but awful memories. Whether we can possibly attain this goal or not, should not impede our relentlessness! The harder you work in service to humanity, the more life is enjoyed! To these ends is why I write. Words are a means to an end. For me, it is to empower and inspire people to bigger and better things, not just for "entertainment."

7. FPN You also publish and distribute zines, leaflets, pamphlets, booklets, etc. for many prisoners around the country. How did that come about?

Answer: As I began writing my own zine, *Thought Bombs*, I sent them far and wide for feedback. I also started an Anti-Racist Action group on the southside of Chicago. At their annual conference in Columbus, Ohio in 1998, I noticed the groups all had publications. I thought it would be a good idea to have all of these available from one source. I floated the idea around and folks thought it was a great idea, but nobody was willing to take this project on. So, the D.I.Y. (Do It Yourself) ethic kicked in. It became more apparent that the prisons were where the insight was at and there was a huge need to help the more conscious prisoners get their work published and distributed, so that's what I did. Being a good anarchist, I put my services where the need was greatest.

8. FPN Prisoners do not earn enough money to cover the expenses of publishing their writing and certainly cannot distribute them. How do these prisoners pay you for what you do for them?

Answer: Well, prisoners are working hard writing, researching, drawing, dealing with all the drama and repression at their gulag. I work hard, too! It's all in service to the cause! It's mutual aid in action. I learn a helluva lot from them. I have developed some amazing relationships and they are quick to pick me up when I am down. Nobody backs me up like prisoners! They keep me laughing. They keep me motivated. They keep me focused. What better payment is there? I tell them, there is no money in this – for you or for me. That's not what this whole thing is about, which makes it all the more priceless!

9. FPN How or what lead you to become involved with prisoners in the first place and what can a prisoner tell someone in society? After all, they victimized society.

Answer: I had wonderful mentors, both inside and outside the razor wire. One in particular I am forever indebted to. His name is Sean Lambert and he's a young prison abolition anarchist, bi-sexual, out of New York. He helped open up many doors for me. Prisoners are like everybody else – victims of this society. Yeah, many have preyed on people and still do. I don't really concern myself much with what brought an individual into prison. It is what they have made of themselves now! Malcolm X & George Jackson were two-bit hustlers before they came in but just look at what they were able to transform themselves into! The real criminals run the show, yet people take what they say without even questioning their sinister motivations. Prisoners see this gruesome society from the ugly underside. This is very helpful in exposing this rotten system.

10. FPN Is it true that America has more convicted citizens in its prisons than any other country in the world, including South Africa and Russia?

Answer: Yes, America has 25% of the world's prison population but only 4.5% of her population. America also usurps 30% of the world's resources! Russia has a lot of prisoners, too. We have more prisoners than China, who has 5 times as many people! The rate of incarceration for black people in the U.S. is double that of South Africa – when apartheid was at its worst! Also, many prisoners around the world are either directly or indirectly incarcerated due to the economic pressure the U.S. corporate dominated governments (often U.S. – trained and manipulated) put to bear on their people. Also, several thousand children die every day due to starvation, preventable disease, bombs, mines, etc. that are caused by this evil U.S. – based global empire.

11. FPN What is your personal opinion about prisons and reforms?

Answer: Any lessening of oppression (reform) is a positive step. We work to get prisoners from stopped being beaten, or get a hearing, edible food or whatever. So, any time anyone can help someone, they should do it! However, prisons themselves are the height of criminality. Kidnapping, abuse, extortion, humiliation and incarceration in a dangerous environment are massive, daily crimes that are all paid for by another huge criminal enterprise – taxes. Most crime is economically motivated and incarceration will not end crime, because a racist, economically unfair system is never "fixed" by the continuous, daily procession of young blacks (and others) into prison. In fact, often those who go through this netherworld come out even more criminally bent. As a prison abolitionist, I detest prison, as I do all oppressive systems. This does not mean, however, that I condone criminal activity nor do I want criminals threatening people whatsoever. Aberrant behavior can be dealt with much more effectively, but only in a society that people have a genuine stake in. Wage-slavery, which is what Amerika is about, has to be abolished as well. We need total, across the board revolution, to uproot the causes of crime. For, people are basically mutually supportive social animals, if they are allowed to grow and flourish in a non-repressive environment. Prison is systemic sadism!

12. FPN FPN was informed that you attended a rally in Lansing, Michigan recently. What was that all about and how did you learn about it being from Chicago. Why did you attend this particular rally?

Answer: I must confess. I really screwed up on this one. For some reason, I thought the rally and march at the state capitol was going to go down on June 25th. The actual date was June 18th. So, about June 22nd, I started getting ready to go and learned it was already over. I apologize to everybody who was counting on me to go and report upon the events of that day. I was informed by some conscious sisters locked up at Robert Scott Correctional Facility in Plymouth, Michigan who put out an excellent newsletter called: *Women For Freedom*. They have a chapter of the National Lifers of America, Inc. Also participating was the Michigan Battered Women's Clemency Project. It was billed as a "March for Corrections and Judicial Reform" and the Purpose of the March was: "The disproportionate incarceration of Black Americans, White Americans, Hispanic and Latino Americans and Native Americans in the state of Michigan is a crisis of mammoth proportions that WE THE PEOPLE must address." It goes on from there. I'll send you these publications. I really regret no going to this event.

13. FPN So you are involved with other programs, organizations and activities in society. What are some of these organizations, etc.

Answer: I co-founded the group, STAND (Shut This Airport Nightmare Down) which is a grassroots citizen's in the area where I live in Eastern Will County, roughly fifty miles south of Chicago. Many state politicians have been hankering to destroy this productive family farmland for a huge airport the airlines don't want. They've already spent \$100 Million in Illinois taxpayer money for this. Conservative Republicans have managed to get Congressman Jesse Jackson, Jr. to be their front man on this unnecessary and wasteful project. Another group I work with is the October 22nd Coalition to Stop Police Brutality. Every year on October 22nd, many people in cities all over the country rally to raise awareness about the constant killings by police of (mostly) young people, the beatings, railroadings, etc. Another group I work with is ABCN (Anarchist Black Cross Network.) I work to help many nascent groups, whether spearheaded by prisoners or others. I help stock infoshops, libraries, contribute articles to various publications, do speaking engagements at colleges and conferences and so forth.